West Coast Story

By George Nicholson

LOVER'S TREACHERY PROLONGED A FEUD

IT WAS AT RESOLUTION COVE, on Bligh Island, Nootka Sound, that Capt. James Cook obtained new spars for his ships, HMS Resolution and HMS Discovery. That was in 1778 and it can therefore be said that the forests on Bligh Island were the first, in what is now British Columbia, to feel the blow of a white man's axe.

The cove was named by the British Admiralty, after the Resolution. Its Indian name is "Kathnjaktl," meaning "a place of driftwood." Discovery Point, about five miles away at the eastern entrance to Nootka Sound, and immediately opposite Friendly Cove, was named after HMS Discovery.

BLIGH ISLAND is the largest of a group of islands which stands in the entrance to Nootka Sound. It was named by Captain George H. Richards, RN, HMS Hecate, when surveying the sound in 1862, after Vice-Admiral William Bligh, who as a captain, was master of the Resolution with Cook. Bligh was later known as "Breadfruit Bligh," owing to the notoriety he gained in connection with the mutiny in the Bounty. Bligh Island is uninhabited.

The passage on the east side of Bligh Island is known as Zuciarte Channel, an adapiton of the Indian name 'ze-sa-at' and derived from the name of a Nootka chief. Cook Channel, the main passage for ships, lies between Bligh Island and Nootka Island.

MUCHALAT INLET (Muchalat Arm on old maps), named after the Indians who lived there, is Nootka Sound's longest arm. In most places, less than a mile wide, it extends 25 miles due east. High mountains rise from the water's edge on either side and it is navigable for ships of any size.

GORE ISLAND, also named by Capt. Richards, after Captain John Gore, RN, a native of Virginia, who was a first lieutenant with Cook in the Resolution, stands in its widest part. Richards also named the passages on either side of Gore Island, after King and Williamson, second and third lieutenants respectively, also of the Resolution.

GOLD RIVER, one of the largest on Vancouver Island, flows in on the north side about six miles from the head of the inlet. Many of its tributaries drain out of Strathcona Park. The Spaniards named the river "Rio Del Oro," but there is no evidence of their having found any gold there. Its native name is 'muchalee,' derived from the name of the Nootka Indians (Mowachahts, 'Indians of the Deer'), who, prior to Maquinna's (Mokwinna) moving his headquarters to Friendly Cove, because it was nearer the open sea, made their principal home there.

The name of the village at the river mouth is "Aaminkis," meaning "mouth of a river."

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However, Maquinna still claimed the fishing rights over all waters in his domain, including Gold River, the only one which provided good all-year-round fishing. This the people who still lived at Aaminkis resented, and raiding of their river by the Nootkas caused ill-feeling and occasionally much bloodshed.

The worst outbreak of violence occurred when Shiyoush, Maquinna's brother, was chief of the Nootkas. At a place called Ow-is, down the inlet a little way, where the Aaminkis people had gone to pick berries and gather grasses, the Nootkas wiped out half the male population of the neighbor tribe.

A maiden from Aaminkis had come to the age to be married. A young Nootka pretended to be in love with her. The wedding was arranged and, according to custom, he invited his friends to accompany him to Ow-is and help him go through all the ceremonies usual to such occasions.

The Nootkas were careful to see that each sat next to a man from Aaminkis. At a given signal they jumped to their feet, drew knives and

FATHER AUGUSTUS JOSEPH BRABANT

other weapons which they had concealed under their clothing and murdered nearly every one of their hosts over 40, an eye-witness testified.

This act of treachery weighed heavily on the minds of the Aaminkis people, but as the Nootkas were a powerful tribe it would have been an act of madness to venture on an expedition of revenge.

Years passed and the Nootkas began to congratulate themselves that the hatred had died out and that they and the people of Aaminkis now harbored friendly feeling towards one another. And so, one day, Chief Shiyoush and two of his men, Kenim and Tokwit, went to Aaminkis (Gold River). Their object was to offer presents to the principal men, and secure fish in exchange.

The Machlats recognized Shiyoush and his companions as some among the murderers of their friends and relatives at the place called Ow-is. The three Nootkas were met by Toushkeyitim, whose son, Kikekeya, had been killed at Ow-is.

He shot Shiyoush dead, shouting at the same time, "Toushkeyitim is my name, my time for revenge has come!"

The other two escaped in their canoe, under a hail of bullets.

On another occasion, a man at Aaminkis was stabbed to death and his wife and daughter taken as slaves to Nootka. But they were afterwards ransomed for 80 blankets and returned to their friends.

The above incidents, and scores of others, are referred to in Father Brabant's memoirs, from information obtained first-hand from descendants of these people. Father Brabant lived amongst them for over 30 years (1875-1908) and spoke their language fluently.

Present-day Muchalat is a new town. In the past ten years, on the flats adjoining Aaminkis village, which now consists of a row of old shacks, has grown the township of Muchalat, population 500. With neat rows of modern bungalows, well laid out along lighted streets, with a ballpark and other recreational facilities, it is the headquarters of the Tahsis Company's Gold River logging operations.

Muchalat is the West Coast terminus of a road which has just been built across the Island from Campbell River. More than 250 men are employed at the Gold River camp, and another 100 at Mooyah Bay, ten miles down the inlet.

A few Indians still live in the Aaminkis houses. All are employed in the logging camp, the husbands in the woods or driving huge diesel trucks, their wives and daughters in the cookhouse. Direct descendants of the two separate tribes, they now inter-marry and live in harmony, without a thought of the days when, at the slightest pretext, their respective ancestors cut one another's throats.

One is Mrs. Beatrice Benedict, a direct descendant of Maquinna, and daughter-in-law of Captain Jack, a Nootka sub-chief, who is now a patient in the Nanaimo Indian Hospital. As a student at Christie Indian Residential School near Tofino, Mrs. Benedict studied the early history of the West Coast, including the occupation of Nootka by both Captain Cook and the Spaniards. With the knowledge thus gained, and from tales told by her grandparents and father-in-law, she can not only recite but add many gruesome details to the incidents chronicled here.

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TAHSIS INLET is another long and narrow arm. On Vancouver's chart, published in 1798, the inlet and village are referred to as Tahshies, and in the Admiralty chart of 1949 the channel is shown as Tasis.

The bay at the head of the inlet, where the town of Tahsis now stands, was known as Macuina basin, evidently after Chief Maquinna, for it was known to be one of his favorite places. Not until Captain Richards surveyed the whole area between 1859 and 1862 in HM Ships Plumper and Hecate, was the inlet officially named Tahsis.

The name obviously is derived from the Indian word "tashee," meaning "a way, trail or passage by land," for commencing at the head of the inlet is a trail which the Indians used to cross over the Island to Nimpkish River on the east coast. This led over a divide to Woss Lake, where they made dugout canoes and travelled down the river to Nimpkish Lake and over to Alert Bay. Until comparatively recently, few white men had crossed Vancouver Island by this route. One was the late Frank M. Kelley, long-time contributor to The Islander.

Prior to 1940, two trappers and a lone prospector were the inlet's only inhabitants. In that year a logging camp (Olsen's) employing about 25 men was established.

Gibson Brothers afterwards built a sawmill at the head of the inlet, around which has since grown the modern town of Tahsis with a population of 1,200, making it the largest town on the West Coast beyond the Albernis. It has paved streets and sidewalks, dial telephones and most of the other facilities enjoyed by people who live in Island cities.

The mill is now owned by the Tahsis Company Ltd., a subsidiary of East Asiatic Company Ltd. It employs 450 men and is one of the most up-to-date in B.C., with an annual capacity of over 80 million feet b.m. and 100,000 units of chips. Its logs come from Gold River, Mooyah Bay, Zeballas, Chamiss Bay and other camps on Nootka and Kyuquot Sounds.

Tahsis is the seventh largest lumber port in B.C. Last year, 134 deepsea ships, flying the flag of practically every nation, loaded there for various parts of the world, principally the United Kingdom, U.S., South America, Australia, the Orient, South Africa and Europe.

TLUPANA INLET, between Muchalat and Tahsis Inlets, is 12 miles long. The name is an abbreviation of Tluplananulg, given by Eliza or Malaspina in 1791, after a Nootka sub-chief "reputed to be one of the first in wealth and power."

Don Jose Manuel Alava, the Spanish governor at Nootka, who in 1794 visited the "inhospitable, looking inlet, with its stupendous precipices and gloomy ravines," expressed his astonishment that such a country could ever have been the object of contention between the respective sovereigns of Great Britain and Spain.

On the shores of the inlet is an old marble quarry, abandoned in 1914. It was owned by a Victoria syndicate headed by the late A. Bechtel, once head of V.M.D., and later by the late Robert Peden.

Some of the marble was used in the construction of the Legislative Buildings. Tons of cut slabs are still there. Fishermen help themselves to it for ballast. They also take it home to make garden paths.